

# LESSON BUILDING

By  
LEON C. PALMER

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## Lesson-Building



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*A PLAN FOR SUNDAY  
SCHOOL TEACHERS*

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By *arles*  
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School Association*



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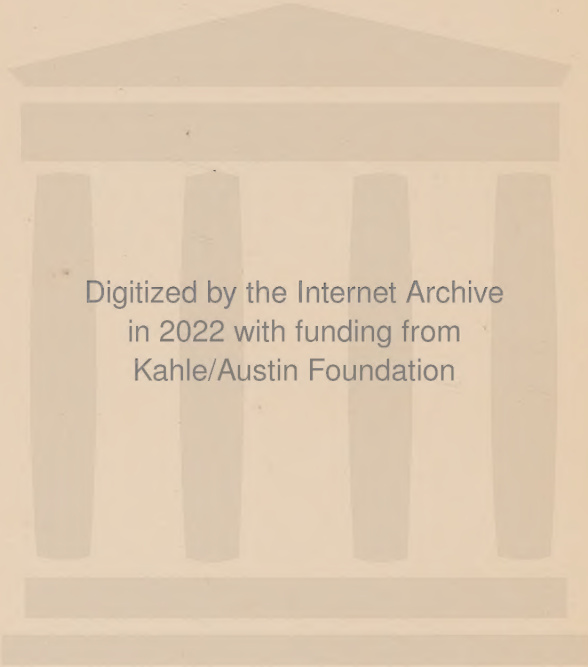


They that be teachers shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.

—*Daniel xii. 3 (R. V., margin).*

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# I

## THE NEED OF A PLAN

**T**HE purpose of this booklet is to furnish to the average Sunday school teacher—the teacher who is without special training in pedagogy, whose time for study is limited, and yet who is in earnest about his work—a simple, definite plan for Lesson-Building. Much has been said in Sunday school conventions and institutes about the importance of lesson preparation, and many interesting and helpful schemes or outlines for study have been presented. As a rule, however, these pertain to the mastery of the lesson material rather than to a plan for its proper arrangement and presentation to the class. Yet this latter is the work which demands the greater skill and of which the average teacher is in greater need.

There are many teachers who study their lessons diligently and thereby acquire a good working knowledge of what is to be taught,

yet are sadly lacking in a knowledge of how to teach it. They feel the need of definite and correct principles to guide them in the selection of the lesson truth and in the grouping of the material to impress that truth. They want a lesson plan simple and general enough to be applicable to all classes and to admit the widest individual freedom in method without transgressing the laws of the human mind. Adams, in his "Primer on Teaching," says: "It will be found that there is an advantage in adopting some general plan that can be applied in every lesson. This saves time, and economizes energy." Certainly if such a skeleton lesson plan for Sunday-school teachers is possible it will be helpful.

And certainly it is possible. Every teacher in every lesson deals with the same three elements—the human mind, the Book taught, and the purpose of teaching—and it is reasonable to believe that there are general principles concerning the relations of each of these three to the others. No two minds are exactly alike, yet there are principles of

psychology which apply to all normal minds. No two teachers will use exactly the same methods, yet underneath all surface differences and individual variations there are certain fundamental principles which are of universal application. It has been well said, "Methods are many, principles few; methods may vary, principles never do." No one would be so unwise as to insist on a uniformity of method among teachers. Each should use methods suited to the class he is teaching, to his own individuality, and to the special lesson being taught. Let it be clearly understood then, once for all, that in speaking of a plan of lesson preparation and presentation, there is no thought of laying down iron-clad laws of procedure, or of hampering, in any way, the individuality of the teacher. All that will be attempted is to point out the essential principles.

Again, we believe that a large part of the effectiveness of every lesson is due to the operation of the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit of God works in accordance with the laws of God. God has ordained certain laws in ac-

cordance with which the mind operates—laws which we call “principles of psychology”—and certainly the teacher who knows and observes these will be more apt to work in harmony with the Spirit of God than one who ignores them. If the gardener must plan his work according to the laws of God impressed upon plant-nature, surely the teacher must plan his higher work in accord with the laws of God impressed upon human nature.

We shall, therefore, consider how certain important laws of the soul bear upon the preparation and planning of the lesson. For convenience the term “Lesson-Building” will be used to include both (*a*) the mastery of the lesson material, and (*b*) the arrangement of this material in proper form for teaching. The former may be called the preliminaries of Lesson-Building; the latter, the plan for Lesson-Building.



## II

### THE "WHAT AND WHY"

**L**ESSON-BUILDING is not simply "learning the lesson." To master the facts and teachings of a given Scripture passage is simply gathering the material out of which to build a lesson. This has its place, it is a necessary preliminary, but it is not in itself Lesson-Building. Many teachers make the mistake of thinking that when they know a lesson in every detail, the connection, the historical setting, the facts of the narrative, the spiritual teachings and practical applications, they are ready to teach it. This does not follow at all. A thoroughly-studied lesson is not necessarily a constructed lesson. To illustrate: Suppose, instead of a lesson, we wish to build a wagon. We first gather all the material that goes to make up a properly constructed wagon—body, axles, tongue, spokes, hubs,

tires, bolts, etc. When we have gathered together all these to the very last item, we have not yet built a wagon ; we have simply secured the material for it. So with the teacher who gathers together all the facts and teachings of a lesson and has a perfect mastery of them ; he has not yet “built” the lesson.

Similarly, when a woman starts to make a dress, she first gets the material—so many yards of this kind of cloth, so many yards of that, thread of a certain colour, the proper lace, ribbons, etc. But all this is not a dress ; it is simply the material for one. It must be put together in accordance with a definite plan (a pattern) before it can be called a dress.

**Lesson-Building** is “Arranging the lesson material according to a definite plan based on correct principles.” If, to return to the illustration, we put our wagon material together in accordance with the plan for a wagon (this plan being based upon correct mechanical principles and the purpose for which we wish to use the wagon), then we have built a

wagon. If the woman puts together the dress material in accordance with the plan for that dress (based upon the nature of the materials used and the special kind of dress she wishes to make), then she has made a dress.

So likewise in teaching. If, after mastering the lesson material, I arrange this material in such a way as to impress the one central truth that I wish to teach (this arrangement being planned in accordance with the laws of the human mind and the special purpose I have in teaching), then I have built, or constructed, a lesson.

Again, I am holding a handful of printers' type. Lying loosely in my hand they are a perfect jumble. No one could make anything out of them in this form. But arranged in proper order they form the words, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life." The type were the same before I arranged them as they are afterwards; I had in my hand every letter that goes to

make up every word of that sentence,—but it was meaningless until properly arranged. So the teacher who has thoroughly studied the lesson has at his command every element necessary to a well-constructed lesson—but the lesson is not constructed until these are arranged properly in accordance with a correct lesson plan.

If I wish to write the sentence, “My mother is at home but my father is out,” I must not only know the necessary words but I must arrange them in the proper order, else I might say, “My father is at home but my mother is out,”—the very reverse of what I wish to say. Likewise, to know the lesson material accurately and to arrange it correctly for teaching are two different matters. Both are important ; neither, alone, is sufficient.

We see, then, that Lesson-Building is not merely knowledge of the lesson (although that is required), but it is, as already defined, “Arranging the lesson material according to a definite plan, based on correct principles.”

Lesson-Building in Sunday school teaching is necessary because of (*a*) the purpose

of the Sunday school, and (b) the pupils of the Sunday school.

(a) The purpose of the Sunday school is to influence character. With those who have not already accepted Christ as their personal Saviour, and who are old enough so to accept Him, the immediate purpose is to influence them to such decision; with the youngest children the effort is to produce in them a right attitude towards the heavenly Father and to teach them to know Jesus; with those who are already followers of Christ the emphasis is on imparting higher standards of Christian living and service, and greater power to live up to these standards. In all cases the ultimate result will be found in character—not merely in knowledge. This, then, we may take as a working definition of our purpose in Sunday school teaching: "To so impress Christian truth that it will lead to Christian living."

Sunday-school work, therefore, is properly termed "Educational evangelism." It is a pitiful and meagre view of teaching which conceives of it as simply imparting an intel-

lectual knowledge of a book, even though that book be the Bible. We are to teach God's Word ; but we are to so teach it that it will move the will to decision for Christ and influence the character towards Christ-like living. We often hear it said, "The test of the teaching is the review," and in a certain sense this is quite true, but in a higher sense the true test of the teaching is not the review but the *life*.

This being true it follows that teaching the facts of the lesson is the means ; impressing the spiritual truth is the end. And if we do not so teach the facts as to impress the spiritual truth, our work is not essentially different from that of the teacher of Roman history, or Greek literature. The fundamental difference between Sunday school teaching and all other teaching is that while other teaching aims chiefly at the intellect or the æsthetic emotions, Sunday school teaching strikes deeper and aims ultimately at the will. In justice to our splendid secular teachers it should be said, however, that the best secular teaching is approximating more and more

closely to the Sunday school ideal in this respect.

Since it is our purpose in teaching "so to impress Christian truth that it will lead to Christian living," it follows that the central thing in lesson preparation is to gather from the Scripture passage the spiritual truth which is to be impressed, and then to select and arrange the facts of the lesson narrative so as to emphasize and bring out in boldest relief this spiritual truth. By study of the lesson passage, and by consideration of the needs of your pupils, and through earnest prayer for the Father's guidance, determine what one great spiritual truth is to be impressed in that lesson ; then select and group the lesson facts around this central truth. Only by so selecting and arranging them can you hope to succeed in doing that which is the very heart and essence of your work—only so can you impress the spiritual truth. A definite purpose can be carried out only by a definite plan.

(b) The pupils of the Sunday school have minds which operate in accordance with cer-

tain principles. The human mind, like all of God's creatures, is subject to law. While we do not know all about the mind, any more than we know all about chemistry, we have learned some of the principles, or laws, that determine its action. So far as these laws are ascertained, we must heed them in our teaching. Hence in our selection of the spiritual truth to be impressed, and in our grouping of facts and illustrations to impress that truth, we must be guided by what we know of the mind's action,—in other words, by the principles of psychology. It is not enough that the truth to be taught is needed by the soul ; it must be presented in such form and order that the mind can grasp and assimilate it. To illustrate ; the body needs carbon as an element of food, but if this carbon were presented in the form of diamonds it could not be assimilated by the digestive organs, although the diamond is the purest known form of carbon. It must be taken in forms which the digestive system can assimilate.

A man might attempt to teach me a lesson



in history, using the German language, while I do not know German. Every word he uttered might be true, but I would learn nothing from his presentation of truth, simply because the truth was not presented in such form that my mind could assimilate it. You may try to teach a six-year-old child a lesson in spherical trigonometry; your demonstrations may be irrefutable, but the child gains no knowledge, for his mind is not yet fitted to receive that form of truth. Truth that is not given in such a way that the mind can receive and assimilate it is like water poured over bottles tightly corked. However needful the water, it is simply wasted—and the bottles remain empty.

When will our teachers learn that it is as important to teach truth in the right way as it is to have the right truth to teach?

### III

#### GATHERING MATERIAL

WE have so far considered the need of a plan for Lesson-Building, what is meant by Lesson-Building and why it is necessary. We now come to the practical question, "How shall we build a lesson?"

The process of Lesson-Building may be divided into two parts, the Preliminaries and the Plan. The Preliminaries consist of two steps, the first of which is gathering material.

This includes most of what is commonly known as "studying the lesson."

Lesson material includes :

(a) *Facts*,—the lesson story, or narrative. The teacher should be sufficiently familiar with this to be able to give in his own language a paraphrase of the lesson. This familiarity can be best acquired by thoughtfully reading and rereading the Scripture text itself,

without note or comment. After this, difficulties should be cleared up, Orientalisms explained, parallel passages carefully read, and the historical and geographical setting of the lesson studied. In this part of the process use the best helps obtainable.

(*b*) *Teachings.* With a clear understanding of the facts of the lesson, and after careful and prayerful meditation, the teacher should jot down on paper the chief teachings and practical applications of the lesson to modern life. The lesson facts are the raw wheat; the lesson teachings are the fine bread made from the wheat. It is important to have a clear and accurate knowledge of the lesson facts, but it is even more important to have a firm grasp of its teachings. A Sunday-school teacher once spent the whole half-hour of the lesson on the crucifixion in discussing whether our Lord was nailed to the cross or tied to it by thongs. Nothing was said about the Saviour who was "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities." This was doubtless an extreme case, but wasting precious time on unimportant

details is not an uncommon fault in classes with untrained teachers.

In studying the lesson to ascertain its teachings the teacher should have in mind his own spiritual needs as well as the needs of his class. If the lesson has helped him, he will be more likely to make it helpful to others. He will not always emphasize in his teaching that which was of most help to him personally; whether he does this or not will depend on circumstances, for he should always select for the central truth in teaching that which will best meet the needs of his pupils. But he will unquestionably teach with greater power if the lesson has been a blessing and inspiration to him before he attempts to give it to others.

(c) *Illustrations*—such as “light up” the truth. These “make clear the subject taught by bringing it into connection with something already well known to the pupil and fully understood by him.” I go into a great cathedral at night. Everything is dark. Nothing is clear, nothing is beautiful, nothing attracts. I touch a button and flood the

whole building with light, and before me is the glorious beauty of nave, transept and high altar, shining with silver and burnished brass and snow-white marble. All this beauty was there before the light shone on it, but it was not visible to me. So a simple illustration may reveal to us all the beauty of a Scripture lesson full of God's great truth.

Use illustrations. Jesus of Nazareth, the Master-Teacher of the world, used them freely and with marvellous effect. In the brief Sermon on the Mount, there are no less than twenty-seven illustrations—yet this discourse, as recorded, would occupy only about one-half the time of an ordinary Sunday-school lesson. The use of illustration was, indeed, so noticeable a characteristic of this Teacher that it is recorded of Him, "Without a parable (*i. e.*, an illustration) spake He not unto them." When He wanted to teach men about the kingdom He came to establish, He did not do it by abstract statements and doctrinal formulæ; He simply said, "The kingdom of heaven is like"—comparing it with some homely thing of every-day

experience. We all resemble the old woman who, when questioned as to what part of Scripture she found most helpful, said, "I like best the *likes* of Scripture." It is the "likes," the parables, the illustrations of Scripture, that have the widest range of influence. "Pilgrim's Progress," which illustrates the Christian life in allegorical form, is known and loved by millions, while the theological disputations and doctrinal sermons of the seventeenth century are familiar only to the antiquary.

An Indian was puzzled when the missionary tried to teach him about the Trinity. No explanation, or statement, of the doctrine seemed to help him. Finally the missionary said, "It is like this. Out yonder is the great river, frozen over and with snow covering the ice. Below the ice is the water. Now the ice is different from the water and the snow is different from the ice, and the water is different from both ice and snow—and yet they are all water. So it is with the Father, Son and Spirit; the Son is not the Father, the Spirit is not the Son, and the Fa-

ther is neither the Spirit nor the Son,—and yet they are all God. They are all different, yet they are all One.” The Indian was satisfied. The illustration made it clear to him.

The wise teacher will be continually on the lookout for illustrations, especially for those that will impress the truth. A lesson which contains one truth and three illustrations of that truth is better than one which contains three truths and one illustration.

## IV

### THE CENTRAL TRUTH

HAVING mastered the lesson material, the second step is to select the central truth to be taught your class. In the selection of this truth, there are three guiding principles.

(a) *The Law of Unity.* "In each lesson there should be one, and only one, central truth." Do not attempt to teach all there is in the lesson passage. You cannot do it, and if you could, it would give your scholars mental and spiritual indigestion. A large part of Lesson-Building consists in deciding what not to teach. One of the most common errors is that of trying to teach all there is in a lesson. The result of the effort is that the teacher really succeeds in teaching little or nothing. This is particularly true where the "verse-by-verse" method is used, attempt being made to exhaust the meaning of each verse in turn.



It is said that Thomas A. Edison in his thirst for knowledge once started to read all the books in the Detroit public library. Beginning at one corner of the building he religiously read every book as he came to it, shelf after shelf, for fifteen solid feet, when the librarian discovered what he was doing and stopped him. Many teachers seem to feel that it is their duty to teach the lesson as Edison read the library—begin at the beginning and go straight through with it, omitting nothing.

It reminds one of the countryman who came into the city and took dinner at the restaurant for the first time. He was handed a *ménu* card and feeling that he was expected to take the whole thing he ordered everything from *consommé* to coffee. The after-effects may be imagined. But many teachers treat the Sunday school lesson as the countryman did the bill of fare—they start at the beginning and try to go straight through to the end.

The wise Sunday school teacher, on the contrary, will select from the Scripture pas-

sage one great truth to be taught his class, and then group everything else around that, passing by with brief mention everything which has no bearing on this central truth. *Non multa sed multum*—"Not many things, but much," is a good maxim for the teacher. The carpenter who drives one nail at a time, driving it well and clinching it, will build a house, but he who tries to drive half a dozen nails at once will build nothing. The teacher who teaches one great truth in each lesson will have taught fifty-two great truths in the course of the year ; but the one who tries to teach every truth in each lesson will at the end of the year find that he has taught little. One lesson truth, taught in three ways, is far better than three different truths. There is an old saying that "he who follows two hares is sure to catch neither." It is applicable to Sunday-school teaching.

It is said that a sportsman saw an advertisement in a New York paper which offered for twenty-five cents to send a sure recipe to prevent a gun from scattering. He sent the money and in return was told, "To prevent

a gun from scattering, put in but a single shot." If teachers would "put in but a single shot" there would be less scattering and more teaching in our Sunday schools.

As a burning glass concentrates all the rays of the sun upon one spot until a fire is kindled, so the wise teacher will concentrate all his knowledge of the lesson facts and teachings on the one central truth for which he wishes that lesson to stand. To the extent to which this is done will the lesson be effective.

In selecting the one central truth to be taught your class, it will be a help to clearness and definiteness to write it down, trying to put it in the most accurate and concise language possible. "Writing maketh the exact man."

(b) *The Law of Positive Suggestion.* The truth to be taught should, as a rule, be positive, not negative—that is, it should tell us what to *do*, not what to *don't*. Negative statements should ordinarily be changed into the corresponding positives, prohibitions of

evil into the corresponding commendations of good, thus expressing the same meaning in a form better adapted to teaching. This is no arbitrary rule or pedagogical technicality. It is based on the laws of the mind. The human mind is so constituted that whatever thought is held before the attention tends to reproduce itself in action. Even though the action contemplated is one which we do not desire to perform, the mere holding it before the mind, focusing the attention upon it, produces a tendency to perform it. The tendency may be inhibited and no action take place, but the tendency was there nevertheless; it was simply overbalanced by other considerations.

This is what psychologists call the "Law of Motor Suggestion." It is stated as follows: "It simply means that we are unable to have any thought or feeling whatever, whether it comes from the senses, from memory, from the words, conduct, or command of others, which does not have a direct influence upon our conduct. . . . For example, the influence of the newspaper reports of crime

stimulates other individuals to perform the same crimes by this principle of suggestion.”<sup>1</sup> Professor Baldwin also says, “It seems well established that a suggestion of the negative, *i. e.*, not to do a thing, has no negative force; but, on the contrary, in the early period it amounts only to a stronger suggestion in the positive sense, since it adds emphasis to the thing which is forbidden.” It is at least true that a positive suggestion to do the right is more effective than a negative suggestion not to do the wrong.

The much-talked-of “New Thought” is largely a popularizing of this principle of suggestion—a training to think of the positive, the good, the uplifting, rather than of the negative and evil. Like many other so-called “new” things, it is not really new at all; as a principle it has been known to psychologists for years. It was anticipated some two or three thousand years by the Bible, in the directions, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life,” and, “Whatsoever things are true,

<sup>1</sup> “Story of the Mind,” Baldwin, p. 17.

honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report . . . think on these things."

A man passing down the street saw some boys making snowballs. They were not looking at him or conscious of his presence, until he called out, "Don't throw that snowball at me,"—whereupon he was promptly bombarded with snowballs. It was the outcome of the "law of suggestion." Avoid suggesting wrong actions to the mind, particularly with young children.

Professor Münsterberg, of Harvard, tells of an alchemist in the Middle Ages who had a recipe for transmuting baser substances into gold. It was a tested and guaranteed method, he claimed, and he sold the secret for a large sum to any one who desired it, each time giving a binding guarantee that if it failed to work (the directions being followed) he would refund the money. Although large numbers bought the recipe and the alchemist became rich from the sales, yet no one ever produced gold and, stranger still, no one ever claimed a refund. The directions were very simple: "Into an ordinary

saucepan drop the yolks of half a dozen eggs. Stir this slowly over a slow fire for thirty minutes, *without ever thinking of the word 'hippopotamus.'*” Nine-tenths of those to whom this recipe was sold had never heard the word “hippopotamus” before, but this “put it into their heads” and the harder they tried to keep from thinking of that unlucky word the surer they were to think of it.

The alchemist may not have been a great chemist, but he was certainly a shrewd psychologist. If the teachers to-day understood the “law of suggestion” half so well as did this mediæval alchemist, we should have less negative teaching in our Sunday-schools. It is far better to emphasize what we should do than what we should not do.

Practically every great spiritual truth or moral duty can be expressed and taught in positive form, and usually with far better results than if stated negatively. Instead of teaching “Do not disobey—lie—steal—drink—swear—be cruel,” etc., we should teach the positive virtues of obedience, truthfulness, honesty, self-control, reverence and kindness. Many

of the Bible commands are negative in form, and properly so, for they are laws, and law is naturally a system of prohibitions. But in teaching these, especially in the elementary grades, the thought should ordinarily be given in positive rather than negative form. Law is naturally expressed in one form, teaching in another.

The lesson truth should be stated as a principle, or a theme, rather than as a categorical command.

(c) *The Law of Adaptation.* "The truth selected should be adapted to the special needs and capacities of the pupils to be taught."

(1) To the needs. The purpose of the Sunday-school is to meet the spiritual needs of the pupil. We all need the one Gospel of Jesus Christ, but we need this presented in different forms and with emphasis on different phases at different times. A class of Junior boys, for example, will not ordinarily be interested in a lesson on "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," nor in one on the joys of heaven. God's Word



is a treasure house in which we may find that which will meet the needs of every human being, and we are commanded to "rightly divide" this Word of truth. In our personal Christian experience there are times when one truth is needed by us, and other times when some other truth will help us more. The teacher who knows the general characteristics of pupils of the age he is teaching, and has a special knowledge of the individual members of his class, can select from the manifold teachings of the lesson that which will best fit their needs.

(2) To the capacities. The truth selected must be within the range of the hearers' experience and mental capacity. There are some great doctrines of Christianity which are just as meaningless to beginners or primary pupils as so much Chinese or Sanscrit would be. The fact that their lips may be trained to utter the words means nothing, for they might also be trained to sing "Rock of Ages" in Chinese, or repeat the Lord's Prayer in Greek, by rote. Jesus, the Master-Teacher, was always careful to fit the lesson

to the capacities of the pupil. To the learned theologian of Jerusalem He discoursed of regeneration (John iii.); to the ignorant Samaritan woman He taught the simple truth, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John iv.). To her He uttered not a word about "regeneration." Jesus always made the pupil central in His teaching, thus anticipating by many centuries the best modern pedagogy. He selected and adapted His lesson according to the needs and capacities of the pupil. We cannot improve upon His method.

In the International Graded Lessons, the Scripture passage is so selected that the Central Truth is usually the one best adapted to the needs of the class. In other courses, it will sometimes be necessary to select for teaching some lesson truth which is not logically the central thing in the lesson passage. This is particularly true in the elementary grades.

## V

### THE COMPLETED PLAN

HAVING gathered the lesson material and selected the one Central Truth to be taught, our next work is arrangement—planning the lesson. This consists in so selecting and arranging the lesson material that it will bring out with clearness and emphasis the Central Truth we have decided to teach, and so linking it with the pupil's knowledge and experience that it will truly become a part of him. A correct lesson plan includes four steps :

(a) *Approach*. The first step in the lesson plan is the Approach, or as it is often called, the "point of contact." By this is meant "anything in the experience or knowledge of the pupil which is related to, illustrates, or exemplifies, on the material plane, the same general principle as the truth to be taught." This is usually to be found in some fact of

every-day life, or from current events, or in some incident or story based on experiences with which the pupil is familiar. The parables of Jesus are matchless illustrations of what is meant by the "point of contact." They were usually every-day experiences of the people in which was exemplified on the material plane the same general principle as the spiritual truth He wished to teach. Note, for example, the parables of the mustard-seed, the leaven, the wheat and the tares, the sower and the four soils, the good shepherd, etc.

Since the Approach is to be something within the experience, or knowledge, of the pupil, it will naturally vary with the age and interests and experiences of the listeners. For example, in teaching the lesson of the Canaanitish woman (Matt. xv. 21-28), we might take as our Central Truth, "Faith is strengthened by using it." Our point of contact, then, for a class of junior boys in a country Sunday school, could be the fact that a blacksmith's arm becomes strong because he uses it so much; for city boys, the fact

that those who use their muscles most at the gymnasium become the strongest athletes. These facts, which are familiar to the pupils in the two supposed classes, are things which in the material, every-day world exemplify the same general principle as the lesson truth—that the more we use any of our powers the stronger it becomes. The more we use the physical power of muscle the stronger it becomes ; likewise, the more we use the spiritual power of faith the stronger it becomes. In using this “Approach,” we are simply using old, familiar knowledge to illustrate and impress new truth. It is obeying the pedagogical maxim, “Proceed from the known to the related unknown.”

In the same lesson passage, we might have taken as our Central Truth, “Faith will overcome obstacles,” and then we could use for an Approach the story of Columbus overcoming the indifference of monarchs and the fears of sailors because he had faith that the world was round. Here again we are using the old to interpret the new, the familiar to explain the unfamiliar.

The purpose of such an Approach is to prepare the mind of the pupil for the reception of the new truth by calling up similar ideas with which to associate it. It "puts the new in an old setting." Speaking of this, Adams says: "The first thing the teacher has to do in seeking to arouse interest in a new idea is to prepare a place for that idea. By talking to the pupil, or by showing him pictures, we must call up in his mind all the ideas he has previously acquired that are likely to come into relationship with the new idea we wish to introduce. . . . This first step refers to the preparation of the pupil's mind, not the teacher's. It consists in finding out which of the ideas in the pupil's mind have any connection with the matter to be treated in the lesson, and in calling up all the ideas that are likely to be helpful. The process is easy in proportion to the knowledge the teacher has of the content of the pupil's mind."<sup>1</sup>

The need for an "Approach" or "point of contact" is based on the way in which the human mind acquires new knowledge. Any

<sup>1</sup> "Primer of Teaching."

new experience that comes to us, any new idea that is presented to the mind, can be understood only by being compared with and associated with something already in the mind. A child, for example, who is familiar with a ball but has never seen an orange, will at first call an orange "a yellow ball." He is comparing the new with the old, he is interpreting the new perception through the aid of the old knowledge. To use Rooper's familiar illustration: A child who had seen feathers but had never seen ferns was shown a pot of luxuriant growing ferns. He at once exclaimed, "See the pot of green feathers!" He was interpreting the new, unfamiliar experience in terms of the old and familiar.

Another child, when his attention was called to the moon for the first time, called it "God's lamp." He was interpreting the new perception in terms of the old. Another, seeing butterflies for the first time, spoke of them as "flying pansies." Instances of this sort could be multiplied from the experience of any mother, or teacher in the elementary grades.

The same process goes on in the mind of the adult. The Indians, for example, speak of the white man's whisky as "fire-water." They are interpreting the new experience in terms of that which is familiar—fire and water.

The average boy is familiar with the fact that one's arm-muscles grow stronger through exercise ; he is not familiar with the fact that faith in Christ is strengthened by using the faith we have. Hence, in the lesson referred to above, we use the old knowledge to prepare for and interpret the new truth we wish to impart.

The Approach is properly taken from the material world, because the natural order in learning is from the concrete to the abstract, from the material to the spiritual. As St. Paul says, "First that which is natural, then that which is spiritual."

In order, however, that this Approach be a true and effective approach, it must be selected with care. In its selection, three things are to be borne in mind.

(1) It should be short and simple. Since



it is not itself the lesson truth, but merely a preparation of the mind for the reception of that truth, we must be careful not to give too much time to it. It is a means to an end, and should be used purely as a stepping-stone to the truth we wish to teach. The steps by which we enter the house are not expected to be as large or elaborate as the house itself.

(2) It should be adapted to the understanding and experience of the pupils. To use the story of Columbus as an Approach with pupils who have studied history is all right, but it would not be a suitable Approach with a class who had never heard of Columbus. Using the new to interpret the new will take us nowhere. If the Approach, the first step of the lesson, is itself strange and unfamiliar to the child, it will not be a true Approach.

Jesus, the world's Master-Teacher, used the principles of lesson construction. Attention has been called to the fact that in the fifteenth chapter of Luke, speaking to a mixed audience of men and women, He used two Ap-

proaches, one for the men and one for the women. He told the story of the sheep that was lost—a familiar experience in the lives of the men in His audience—and the story of the woman who lost the piece of silver, which was within the experience of the women in His audience. Similarly, in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, He likened the kingdom of heaven first to a mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, and then to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal. Again in John iii. 15, talking with the Jewish rabbi who was perfectly familiar with every portion of the Old Testament, He used as His Approach the story of the brazen serpent; in the next chapter, talking with a woman, one of whose daily occupations was the drawing of water, He used “water” as His Approach.

(3) It should relate to and foreshadow the spiritual truth to be taught—not the mere historical facts of the lesson. Here is one of the most common mistakes, even among lesson-writers and those who have studied Lesson-Building. The mistake is due, per-

haps, to the tendency to regard the Approach as simply a "bait for attention," a mere device to catch the attention of the class at the beginning of the lesson period. Gaining and holding the attention is very important, but it is evident from what has already been said that the purpose of the Approach is to do much more than this. It should, of course, capture the attention of the class, for without attention there is no teaching, but the essential purpose of the Approach is to prepare the pupil's mind for the reception and understanding and assimilation of the spiritual truth. It does this by bringing to the front those ideas already in his mind which are similar to the new truth to be presented and therefore most useful in interpreting it. And since it is the spiritual truth of the lesson that we wish him to assimilate and reproduce in his own life, the Approach must relate to that and foreshadow it.

A well-known lesson writer suggested that we begin the lesson on Matthew xiv. 22-36 (Jesus walking on the sea) by asking the questions—"How many of you boys can

swim? How far can you swim? Is it easier to swim in quiet water than through big waves?" etc. As a "bait for attention" this was doubtless good; as an Approach it was worthless. While it was "simple and short" it certainly did not relate to, nor suggest, the spiritual truth of the lesson. It was connected simply with the facts of the lesson—the storm, the walking on the waves, etc. "Swimming" was hardly the spiritual truth of the lesson.

Again, a popular and helpful lesson writer, on the lesson about the Canaanitish woman, suggested that the lesson be introduced by a discussion of Phenicia as the source from which we get our alphabet. This, of course, simply connects with the geographical location and not with the spiritual truth.

Instances of this sort might be multiplied indefinitely. It should be entirely clear that the Approach has nothing whatever to do with the facts of the lesson narrative, its historical or geographical situation, or anything else whatsoever except the spiritual truth which it is the aim of the teacher to

impress. The Approach may be a question, an illustration, a story, a picture, an object ; it may be anything, provided only that it connect with and exemplify the spiritual truth of the lesson. If it does not relate to and foreshadow this, then it is not a proper Approach.

(b) *Transition.* In the Approach we have associated the lesson truth with that which is like it in the material world, the every-day experience of the pupil. The next step is to associate it with the already-acquired religious knowledge in the pupil's mind. In the Approach we were on the material plane, in the Transition we go to the spiritual plane and bring in the thought of God.

An ideal Transition is one which associates the new truth to be taught with the spiritual truth taught in some previous lesson, or otherwise familiar to the child, or with some Bible facts or stories familiar to him. To go back to our lesson on the Syro-Phenician woman, if we use for our truth, "Faith overcomes obstacles," and for our Approach the story of Columbus, we might use for the Transition the story of the four men who

brought a paralytic to Jesus, how they overcame every difficulty, even to the point of tearing up the roof—all because of their faith in His power to heal their friend.

Psychologists tell us that one of the fundamental laws of memory is the “ Law of manifold association,” which simply means that whatever we wish to remember should be associated with as many familiar, well-known ideas as possible. One purpose of the transition is to utilize this psychological law by associating the new lesson truth not only with every-day life but also with religious ideas and already-acquired Bible knowledge. The more closely woven is this web of association, the more retentive will the memory be.

The Transition, like the Approach, should be short and simple, adapted to the pupils, and, of course, related to the spiritual truth to be taught. Because of the difficulty which they experience in finding suitable Transitions, some teachers occasionally omit it. It is better to include it. With a good Transition, the truth taught will be more clearly understood and better retained.

(c) *Historical and Geographical Setting.*

The next step after the Transition is to bring out the historical and geographical setting of the lesson. This includes (1) the connection with previous lessons, usually in the form of brief review or test questions, and a statement of the intervening events; (2) the time and place of the present lesson.

The extent of this, and the manner in which it is given will of course depend upon the age and ability of the class and the character of the lessons being taught—whether they are connected historical narrative, or are topical. With the latter class of lessons it would of course be greatly modified and simplified. In the younger grades, where previous study of the lesson is not expected, this step can be used to refresh the memory of the previous Sunday's lesson; with the older pupils it may be also used to test the preparation on the lesson for the day.

(d) *The Lesson Facts (or "Lesson Story").*

The historical and geographical setting having been given, the Facts of the lesson naturally follow without any break. In the elementary

grades, the lesson facts are, of course, given largely in story form; with older pupils wherever possible they should be elicited by questioning. The particular method of presenting or drawing out the lesson facts will vary widely, according to the characteristics of the class and the preferences of the teacher. Certain principles, however, hold good in all cases. The lesson facts (or lesson story, as elementary workers call it) should be —

(1) Selected. No one should attempt to teach every detail of any lesson. Simply select the salient points. The teacher, in order to teach with power, should know accurately the details of the lesson; he cannot know too much about it; but in presenting the lesson to the class he should select those facts which are of the greatest value and significance. We have but a few precious moments and since our goal is not merely an intellectual knowledge of the lesson but a deep impression of the spiritual truth, we must not allow ourselves to be side-tracked into petty details.

(2) Grouped. The Lesson Facts selected



should be chiefly such as can be grouped around, and used to emphasize, the great central truth to be taught. "Arrange facts so that the truth will shine through." The truth to be taught will determine the selection, the arrangement, and the relative emphasis to be placed on the lesson facts. Some things will be brought out in bold relief, while others will be in the background. The teacher should so select and arrange the facts and illustrations as to lead up to and impress the central truth. This is the climax of the lesson. To do this will necessitate careful thought and planning, but it will be abundantly repaid.

(3) Largely positive. Since the truth to be taught is stated in positive form, the facts to be emphasized in teaching will usually be positive rather than negative. This, however, is only a general statement. The selection of material in each case will depend upon the contents of that particular lesson. In the beginners' and primary departments it is usually best to use the positive; in the older grades we can bring in the negative by

way of contrast, just as Correggio used the dark shadows in his pictures—to throw into bolder relief the pure white light of the positive.

(4) Largely concrete. With the younger pupils the lesson should be almost wholly concrete; with older pupils the concrete should still form a large proportion.

Perhaps it may not be out of place to illustrate what is meant by these terms “concrete teaching” and “abstract teaching,” which so frequently occur in pedagogical writings to-day. A good illustration is that given by Prof. Martin G. Brumbaugh in his book, “The Making of a Teacher” (page 169).

“Teacher A says, ‘Children, it is noble, good and grand to be kind and helpful to those in need. This is all the more true when the person is a cripple. I want you to remember this, and try always to be on the lookout for chances to render such aid.’

“Teacher B says, ‘Children, one cold Sunday morning in December, when the pavements were icy and dangerous, an old man was slowly making his way to church. He

was a cripple. He trembled as he leaned on his crutch and his cane. At the steps to the church he set his crutch and cane upon the icy stone and endeavoured to lift his weak and trembling body to the next step. His crutch slipped on the ice. He almost fell. Thus several times he did his best to enter his church. Each time he slipped and with pain recovered himself. Just then a college boy came that way. He saw the old man in his struggle and, hurrying forward, put his arms gently around the poor cripple, lifted him carefully to the vestibule, opened the door, set the old man down, and walked hastily away. Tell me, children, what do you think of that college boy? ”

The first teacher taught abstractly, that is, he gave words and definitions and general statements. The second teacher taught concretely ; he gave a particular instance.

The teaching of Jesus was characterized by great concreteness. Instead of giving a formal definition of neighbourliness, He gave the parable of the Good Samaritan. Instead of defining theism, He taught us to say “Our

Father.” Instead of discussing the nature and origin of sin in theological language, He gave us the parable of the Prodigal Son. We have already touched on His abundant use of illustrations—they are simply examples of concrete teaching.

The observant reader will doubtless ask here, “What about the application of the lesson?” Religious and moral truth is valueless unless applied to the life—but an “application” made by the teacher will not have half the force that the application made by the pupil himself will have. It was once customary (and, unfortunately, many teachers still cling to it) to tag on a moral, or “application,” at the close of each lesson. Modern psychology and pedagogical science have taught us a more excellent way to accomplish the end in view. Instead of the teacher making the application to the class, the lesson itself should be so presented that the pupil will see the application for himself. Unless he does, it is useless for the teacher to try to point it out to him by means of a little homily

at the close of the lesson. In a lesson properly taught, according to the principles of lesson construction, the application will be made clear and evident in the process of teaching. It will not be necessary for the teacher to say, at the close, "Now, children, what does this lesson teach?" The "*hic fabula docet*" of the moralizer is a cloak to cover pedagogical failure.

This, of course, does not mean that it is not helpful to bring out from time to time some of the bearings of the lesson on life to-day; but what is to be avoided is a set, formal "application" of the lesson truth. Indeed, the wise teacher will seek for assimilation rather than application, and will realize that truth is more effective when assimilated by the soul than when externally applied, like a mustard-plaster. If the lesson is properly taught it will be assimilated by the pupil and a formal application at the close will be needless; and if it is not well taught, an attempted application will be useless.



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